

Upstate, downstate getting cuddly

■ If not in love, the two are definitely 'in like' and there's no more talk of divorce.

BY SENIOR EDITOR

JIM MEMMOTT

Maybe it's the New York Yankees.

Maybe it's *Seinfeld* and those happy Gotham-based sitcoms.

Maybe it's economic good

times.

Whatever the reason, after years of feuding, upstate New Yorkers may actually have started liking New York City enough to keep it in the family.

At least that's the surprising opinion of state Sen. John

R. "Randy" Kuhl, R-Hammondsport, Steuben County, a longtime supporter of a proposal to split the state in two, dividing the New York City metropolitan area from the rest of New York.

"People aren't as frustrated with being linked to New York City as they were," Kuhl said. "I don't have any hope for this proposal now. I don't think you will see movement."

Nonetheless, Kuhl and others have sponsored bills in the Senate and the Assembly that would allow the residents of every county in New York to answer the following question:

"Do you support the division of New York into two separate states?"

The county-by-county straw

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Upstate

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vote would be the first step in an elaborate process, as the state Legislature, the state's voters and Congress would all have to approve the split.

Patricia Braus of Rochester, a free-lance medical writer, knows already how she would vote, sort of.

"We wouldn't have the Yankees any more. I'm against it," Braus said. "But then, we wouldn't have Donald Trump. That would be a positive."

Dump Trump? How about George Steinbrenner, the Yankees' often-loathed principal owner?

"The last time I was at Yankee Stadium they played New York, New York, which is a song I despise," said Gary Muldoon, a former member of the Rochester City Council. "That and George Steinbrenner did make me want to upchuck."

Nonetheless, Muldoon would keep the state whole, as would Brian Shiffrin, Monroe County's first assistant public defender.

"I've lived upstate, and I've lived downstate, and I'm thrilled it's one big unhappy state," Shiffrin said. "Isn't it better to have one big unhappy state than two smaller unhappy states?"

An old tension

Sarah Liebschutz of Pittsford, a professor emerita of political science at State University College at Brockport, said tension between big cities and their suburban and rural neighbors is common.

And a city like New York, so large, so boisterous, can be an easy target.

"It's a favorite whipping boy," she said. "When you can't come up with anything else, you whip the big boy."

It's not only New York City. Some Illinois residents have suggested that Chicago go its own way.

Californians have discussed creating at least two states (northern and southern California) and maybe a third (central California).

Kuhl first proposed the New York split in 1993. His bill has never gotten out of committee, and Kuhl has no hope that it will this year.

Kuhl would redraw state lines so that Westchester and Rockland

counties, plus Long Island and New York City would form one state.

The rest of New York — Buffalo, Rochester, et. al. — would be another state, to be called West New York.

The new states would recognize realities that have made upstate and downstate an odd couple: Upstate is generally rural and Republican. Downstate is urban and Democratic.

Kuhl said the split would resolve a tension that has existed almost since New York state was created.

That tension was high in the 1970s when New York City experienced its fiscal crisis and seemed to drain resources from the rest of the state.

Matters weren't helped in 1982 when New York City Mayor Edward Koch, a candidate for governor, talked about pickup-driving rural residents who have to travel "20 miles to buy a gingham dress or a Sears, Roebuck suit."

Show me the money

In contrast to the '70s and '80s, upstate and downstate would seem to be peacefully co-existing now.

"When there's a strong economy, the difficulties both upstate and downstate tend to be minimized, and some of the commonalities of being New Yorkers can be resurgent," said Jennifer Leonard, president of the Rochester Area Community Foundation.

And because the economy in New York City is doing especially well because of a Wall Street boom, the rest of the state is helped signif-

icantly by tax revenues from New York City.

That's the conclusion of a recent report by the Rochester-based Center for Governmental Research, which estimates that New York City contributes about \$5 billion more in revenue than it receives in state expenditures. The extra money from the city finds its way upstate, helping soothe the pain of job losses and flat earnings.

"It would be hard on us to get rid of Manhattan," said Kent Gardner, director of economic analysis at the center.

"We do pretty well by those guys."

So do farmers, said John Lincoln of West Bloomfield, Ontario County, president of the New York Farm Bureau.

"We have a large number of consumers in metropolitan New York," Lincoln said. "You don't hear as much about separating as you did five years ago."

'One state, one state'

It's not just the money.

Crime is down in New York City. The Yankees won the World Series. Times Square sparkles. Tourism is up. And even if people can't get to New York City, the city will come to them, more or less.

There are now about seven Manhattan Bagel restaurants in the Rochester area, an indication that the city is now a marketing plus, rather than a minus.

Sample the food. Sample the opinion: Staff and patrons at the Manhattan Bagel restaurant at Four Corners recently were decidedly opposed to splitting New York in two.

"One state, one state, don't separate it," said Janice Fields of Rochester.

"I love New York City," said Kristen Perry, a patron from Honeoye Falls. "I have relatives out there, and I would keep it in the state."

Where is it?

Deborah Davis, the mayor of Caledonia, Livingston County, and a one-state supporter, visits New York City often because her son, Patrick, is a police officer there.

In her travels about the city, Davis has discovered some confusion about just where the rest of the

state might be.

"They think we're in Canada," Davis said.

Or beyond.

Edwin Lopez-Soto, a Rochester lawyer who is married to Patricia Braus, grew up in Manhattan with only a vague and fearful sense of upstate. "We thought living in New Jersey was Siberia," Lopez-Soto said. "Living in Rochester was worse than Siberia."

Coming here in 1983, Lopez-Soto learned that Rochester, if not Siberia, was still cold.

"In New York City, nobody buttons up his coat. It's a point of pride," he said. "Here you have to. And I have to wear these earmuffs that make me look like a total dork."

Regardless of the cold, Lopez-Soto would retain New York City.

Even the anti-Steinbrenner Muldoon would not split the state unless upstate could get something in return, like another state.

"There would have to be some kind of equal swap," Muldoon said. "Would I take Pennsylvania? No, no. But, hey, I'd take Vermont, and I'd take Connecticut, regardless." □

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